

Title: The Structure and Immanence of Epiphany Scenes in *War and Peace*
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Literary epiphany scenes, or intense and transformative experiences of everyday reality, at once mysterious and revelatory, occupy a central structural and thematic position in *War and Peace*. This paper analyzes several epiphany scenes featuring Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, including his wounding at Austerlitz, his crossing of the river at Bogucharovo and his encounters with the oak tree. A phenomenon of indeterminate content and significance, the epiphany defies the attempts of both protagonist and narrator to either articulate or conceptualize the nature of the experience, in turn challenging the representational parameters of Tolstoy's art. How can an experience that seems to transcend the discursive and denotative properties of language find expression in language itself? Moreover, does the device of epiphany violate the conventions of prose Realism, or does it advance, rather, the Realist literary project?

This paper explains how the objects of Bolkonsky's epiphanies are rendered "present" to the reader, tracing Tolstoy's deployment of phonic, rhythmic and syntactical devices, enumerated by Richard Gustafson in his discussion of the achieved "effect of presence" in the novel (Gustafson 1986: 375-91) that enables the reader's experience of a sensory analogue to the moment of epiphany. Adopting a phenomenological approach to reading and reception, the paper details how Tolstoy likewise renders natural space present to the reader in an ideational capacity. Drawing upon elemental features of the epiphanic environment, such as immensity and verticality, Tolstoy elicits the reader's "constitution" of an archetypal space as aesthetic object, whereby prosaic details coalesce with the reader's memory and imagination in the creation of a personalized image of the scene of epiphany (Bachelard 1994). The paper will ultimately demonstrate how the reader, in assuming the "burden of interpretation" of an aesthetic experience of presence and immediacy (Nichols 1987: 33), is cast as the subject of epiphanic experience itself.

References

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